

Waukegan News Sun, September 18, 2006

LIBERTYVILLE - Looking out into the faces of students at Libertyville High School on Monday, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, saw on the fifth anniversary of 9/11 a new generation taking shape in the faces of students.

The students gathered for a voluntary assembly and Kirk said that while sometimes there are a few students staring off, he didn't see that this time.

"I looked into their faces and there was not a tired eye in the house. They were riveted by the ceremony, the World War II veterans and the ceremony they had at the tree they planted after September 11," the congressman said.

"The most-lasting affect of 9/11 is not on we adults, it's on these kids. It's their first political memory," said Kirk. "In the polls and analysis of their attitudes and feelings you see something extraordinary."

And that is that they have more in common with their grandparents' generation, the Greatest Generation, who remembered Pearl Harbor and the tribulations of the Great Depression.

"This generation is more civic minded, more patriotic...you could see that in their eyes," said Kirk.

Libertyville High School's student council organized the solemn 9/11 commemorative ceremony and fourth annual flag vigil. Principal Brad Swanson opened the ceremony that also included the marching band, students singing the National Anthem and a tribute where the flag that had been flying outside at the high school is given as a guard an important person in the school community.

In the past the students held a 24-hour vigil, but it was shortened this year because the anniversary fell on a school day.

"We really wanted to preserve the memory of the firefighters and policemen that were victims of the attack," said Elliott Isaac, a senior who is the Student Council's executive board vice president.

"We had a tremendous outpouring of student support," he said after finishing his half-hour vigil. All the class presidents took the first half-hour vigil at 6 a.m., he said.

Standing there quietly, he said it was easy to contemplate what happened that day and what it means.

"We all remember where we were when it happened," said Isaac, who like the rest of his generation, was in school. "I just really hope that the general population, and especially our own

generation, remember what happened. I hope this is something no one will ever forget."

Swanson recalled how ordinary people have responded to tragedy with extraordinary efforts, such as the 343 firefighters that left their quarters and raced to the World Trade Center, the Pentagon or the plane crash site in Pennsylvania. Of the thousands that died, 343 of those were firefighters.

"We'll never know the true extent of all the heroism that took place on that September day. But with each passing year, September 11 should continue to teach us to appreciate the things we all too often take for granted," he said, like our families, neighborhood, community and schools.

"May the tragedy of September 11 remind us of our sense of community. And may we pay tribute to those whose lost their lives, by recommitting to the American values of respect,

"Respect those that lost their lives in this tragedy by thanking someone for a job well done, or reminding someone that you love them," the principal said.